

STATE OF HOMELESSNESS REPORT

1996/1997

Report on Community Housing Initiatives
Community Services, City of Toronto

STATE OF HOMELESSNESS REPORT - 1996/1997

Executive Summary

"State of Homelessness - 1996/1997" provides some information about changes which have affected the lives of homeless people and the community agencies in the City of Toronto that they turn to for help.

The report describes how City responses are evolving to meet changing needs. Specifically it describes the challenges and activities of the Homeless Initiatives Program.

This report summarizes data gathered over the past year which illustrates the growth and changing nature of homelessness.

There is also a review of the approach taken by the City and its community partners to respond to homelessness. The starting point is the City's original "Off the Streets" policy and its three component parts: prevention, outreach, and support for change. A new long term initiative to develop a broad housing strategy to respond to the changing needs of the City's population of homeless people and other recent initiatives are described at the end of this report.

To learn more about the causes and consequences of homelessness as we have learned to describe them, please refer to the attached sections of this report.

The number of people touched by homelessness is growing. People are losing their stable housing and there are more people who are isolated from almost all social supports. There are new complexities of issues as people who have never been homeless before mingle with those chronically on the street. Community services are stretched and solutions are difficult to implement.

To be homeless is to be in crisis. Experience indicates that the longer people remain homeless the more complex and diverse their issues become. Now more than ever the City needs to remain committed to its original principles and to support a range of homeless initiatives that provide homeless people with opportunities to improve their lives.

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Introduction

This report reviews the changes over the last year which have affected homeless people and the agencies which help them. We present statistics on housing availability and hostel use and information on other programs offered to homeless people. Then we describe the ways in which the City responds to existing and emerging needs through the Community Housing Initiatives Program.

This report was prepared by the staff from Community Housing Initiatives (Housing Division of Community Services, City of Toronto). For more information or additional copies please refer to the back cover.

We hope that readers will find this document to be a useful reference for the context and purposes of the Community Housing Initiatives Program.

At the core of our work is the belief in human dignity and the right of all people to participate in creating solutions which are appropriate to changing and often misunderstood needs. Our aim is to protect the health and safety of homeless citizens while developing and implementing these solutions.

**Our approach is
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Our approach is collaborative, flexible and whenever possible focused on long-term sustainable success. The City's role since 1976, when it formed the Alternative Housing Subcommittee, has been to

directly address a broad scope of homeless issues. We are active partners with homeless people in community-based initiatives, community groups, the volunteer sector and other levels of government.

The current environment for this work is a challenging one.

The lives of homeless people and people living in poverty have been dramatically affected by economic and government policy changes in the past several years. The number of homeless people has increased and they are more visible on the streets. Tragedies due to homelessness have heightened stress levels for those remaining on the streets. The capacity of formal support programs for homeless people has been reduced largely as a consequence of cutbacks in provincial funding. Society is more aware than ever of the necessity for solutions appropriate to the complexity of the problem.

Section 1 The Challenges

Government cuts have combined with massive social and economic changes in the last decade to create a larger more vulnerable class. The social spending cuts announced in 1995 by the Federal and Provincial governments were the most significant that residents of Ontario have seen in the post-war period.

They come after years of economic recession and job loss, which was partially softened by this social spending. At the same time the nature of the social service system is changing; the focus shifting from entitlement to relief.

Working people in the City lost their jobs because of economic "restructuring". A total of 87,000 jobs were lost in the City of Toronto between 1990 and 1995. Many jobs are still being lost in the manufacturing and service sectors. The remaining jobs are either low paying, too low for a viable existence, or high paying, high skilled, leaving behind many people who do not have the appropriate level of skills.

Informal support networks that helped low income families are stretched to the limit. People are having difficulty getting support from their communities, families, friends and workmates because of diminished resources.

Incomes for families with children have declined 19% since 1990. As many as 35,000 children, or one in three in the City, now live in poverty (Social Planning Council, Project 2000, 1996.) A Daily

Bread Food Bank survey (February 1996) reported a 54% increase in food bank usage over the same time in 1995. Eviction applications and writs of possession (most for non-payment of rent) have been increasing steadily since the early 1990s.

Direct government support for the creation of new affordable housing is no longer available.

Direct government supports for the creation of new affordable housing are no longer available. People who would otherwise be self sufficient and able to live independently in the community cannot find appropriate,

affordable housing.

A decade of changes in mental health treatment, increases in family breakdown and addiction problems have all contributed to more homelessness. Policies of moving people from institutions into the community have manifested in an assembly of people with mental health concerns moving onto the street and into shelters. Admissions in shelters due to family breakdown or abuse which were 3,408 in 1988 more than doubled to 7,612 in 1995. Staff from hostels and drop-ins report that people's struggles with chronic alcoholism pale in comparison to their problems when they become addicted to crack which is now commonplace.

1.1 Affordable Housing in 1996

Finding affordable housing has become really difficult. The Provincial moratorium on non-profit housing in 1995 meant that 385 projects (16,732 units) in early development were cancelled. In the City of Toronto only 10 of 33 proposed projects will be finished. Planning and development of new social housing, which typically takes three to five years, has been shut down at a time when the vacancy rate has dropped below one percent.



Waiting lists for existing public, non-profit and co-op housing are prohibitively long, usually three to eight years.

The number of people contacting registries for housing referrals has grown steadily over the past year although supply in the private sector has remained constant. A small example which illustrates the competition for units is shown in the Open Door Centre and Rooms Registry statistics.

Keeping affordable housing when there are landlord tenant issues to be resolved is also a real challenge. Information on landlord and tenant laws has been provided by tenant's associations which have also supported tenant organizing activities.

The Provincial Community Partners program which supports tenant organizing, housing advocacy and housing help centres has been reduced from \$7 million in 1994 to \$2 million in 1997.

Housing affordability continues to be a problem for people who are vulnerable to homelessness. A third of all renters are recipients of social assistance. The survey results of rooming house landlords at the beginning of 1996 showed 46% of their tenants were experiencing difficulty paying their rents.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
1995	80	82	63	110	108	78	92	93	191	120	226	172
1996	167	187	179	149	214	118	211	178	239	225	272	223

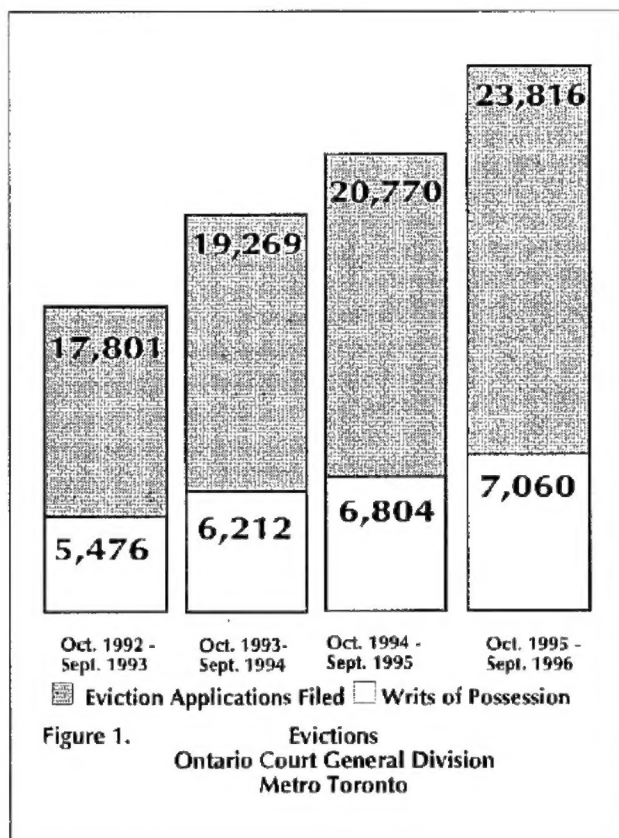
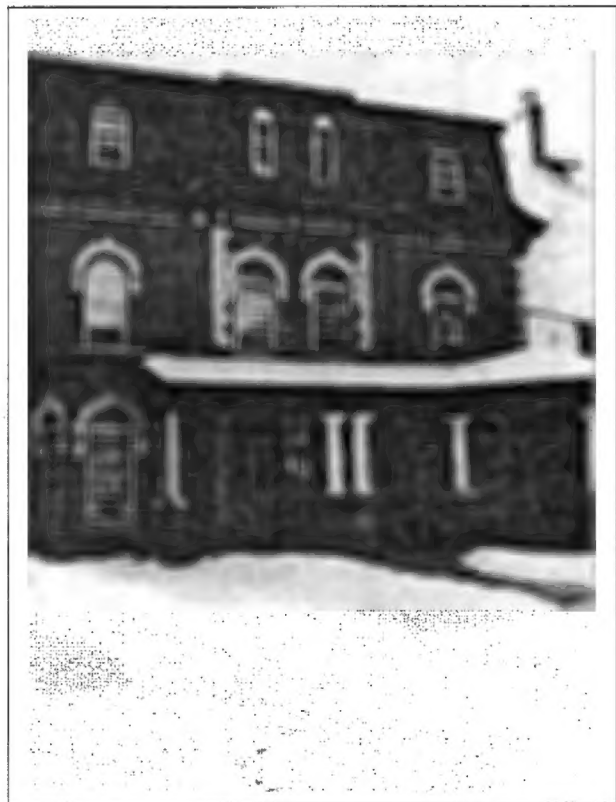
Table 1. Open Door Centre and Rooms Registry - low income people looking for accommodation.

When welfare rates were decreased, we asked rooming house landlords if they would reduce their rents; 67% of respondents said no. Landlords said that they are reluctant to rent to people on General Welfare Assistance due to the difficulties and costs inherent in the eviction process.

A general observation is that people are moving down the socio-economic ladder from self-contained apartments to rooming houses (displacing traditional rooming house tenants). Landlords are more selective in choosing new tenants; 65% of landlords said they are unwilling to house people dealing with mental health, substance use or other issues, although this number was reduced to 54% when asked whether they would be willing to do so if supports were made available.

Families on income assistance can no longer afford both nutritious food and rent because the maximum shelter allowance is less than average rents. The most recent available data show that at the end of 1995, 83% of all two parent families with two children receiving GWA benefits had shelter costs above the shelter maximum (Metro Community Services, June 1996).

Evictions, typically resulting from non-payment of rent, have been increasing for the past five years (see Figure 1). In 1995 Metro Hostel Division reported that eviction from rental accommodation and family breakups were the most common reasons for hostel use for people who were not chronic shelter users. The increase in evictions has an impact on all the parties involved; the tenants, the landlords, the courts and the social services to which the former tenants turn for help.



1.2 Increased Use of Hostels and Other Overnight Shelters

Metro hostels are under pressure. There is very little spare room in the system.

Renovations to one women's shelter last year, which in previous years would have caused only minor disruption, placed tremendous pressure on operators; demands rose moderately but half the beds in the largest facility were out of commission.

The men's system has been well beyond its regular capacity all year. Public scrutiny during two significant inquests has added to the pressure by focusing attention on the men's system, particularly Seaton House, the largest men's hostel in Toronto. Additional demands were placed on the system when measures for extreme cold weather conditions required more beds to be made available within existing shelters.

An alarming trend is the number of people who are newly homeless. They often find it frightening to be in a shelter or on the street. They have not yet developed the skills that chronically homeless people

acquire over time to survive on the street. They do not recognize potentially violent situations, they do not know the alternative service system, they cannot identify health risks and their pride is a barrier to accepting help.

General Statistics

Metro shelters provide beds for about 4,500 people every night, with occupancy rates ranging from 80% to 95% depending on the season. Four hostels are run by Metro and the others by non-profit agencies. Eighty percent of the beds are located in the City of Toronto.

Additional capacity has been added to the system in the past two years in three ways: opening new locations (Strachan House, Savards, Annex Program, Fife House, Mary's Home); adding beds in existing hostels (especially for women); and, expanding the motel capacity for families.

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Number of beds each night*	2,266	2,385	2,394	3,798	4,582
Number of people using hostels	27,216	27,074	25,009	27,233	n/a

Table 2. Metro Toronto Hostel Statistics

Source: Metro Hostel Division "Status Report on Homeless Shelters" January 1996 and System Capacity statistics, 1995.

*includes domiciliary, emergency and some Out of the Cold beds

In 1995 about 27,000 different people stayed in hostels and 24,000 of these people were first time users. There are several hundred people, mostly men, who use the shelter system as their permanent home.

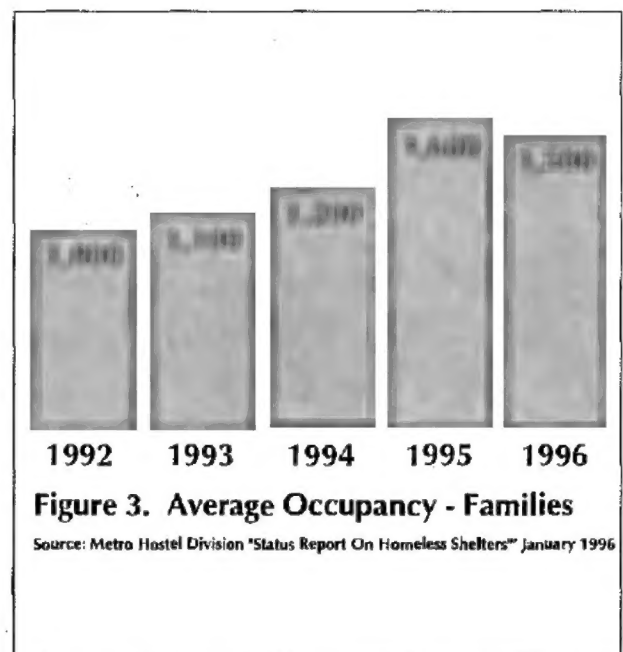
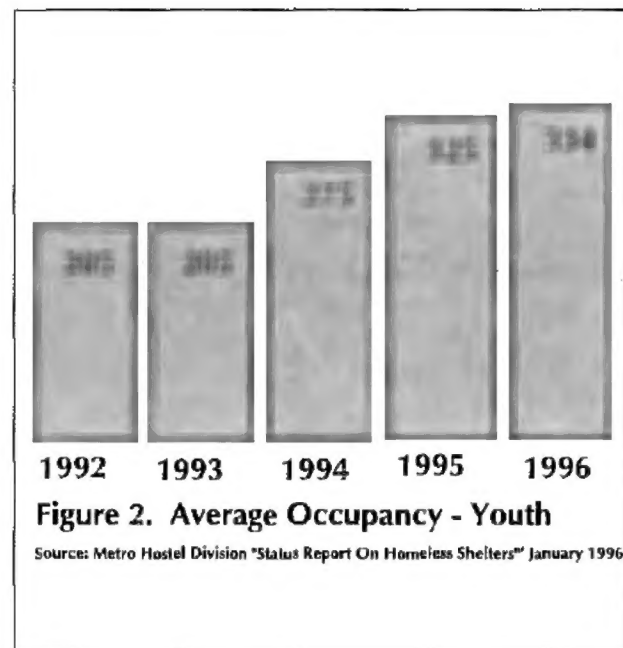
Occupancy rates vary according to the client category and demand has been fluctuating within each of the client groups; youth, families (two parent and women-led), single women and single men.

Youth

In 1996 the daily trends in occupancy of shelter beds were relatively steady for youth (325 to 340 people) although the overall trend is for higher occupancy (about 20 to 30 more people each night) in 1996 than in 1995. These people have been accommodated in 46 extra beds added in existing shelters at the beginning of 1996.

Families

Steady use by two parent families (650 - 750 people) occurred throughout 1996 at daily rates slightly below 1995 averages. Women with children occupied about 900 beds at the beginning of the year, a rate of about 300 people higher than the previous year. Numbers dropped in the summer returning to about 850 people by the fall. This is a flexible system and beds in motels are added as needed. Figure 3 shows five year statistics for two parent and single parent families.



Single Women

In the first half of 1996, occupancy rates for single women (225 - 270 people) were slightly below 1995 levels due to renovations on Women's Residence but rose steadily at the end of the year. In October 1996 occupancy was 105% of capacity. Two new projects, Mary's Home (15 beds) and Savard's (15 beds) opened in late 1996 and Fife House, at 86 Lombard St. (38 beds) opened in early 1997.

Single Men

Of grave concern is the number of men seeking shelter during the coldest months (in December 1996 the average daily occupancy was 1,218.) Occupancy has increased between 1995 and 1996 by about 20% (200 men) during the cold weather. It is typical of the men's system that occupancy decreases by about 200 men during the summer; this is reflected in the yearly averages. Figure 4 shows the averages for the past five years.

In 1996, winter shelter has also been available through the "Out of the Cold" program in churches and other facilities, and at Council Fire's overnight drop in. These services are used mostly by single men.

The Annex Program, 38 beds based on a harm reduction model, is a significant year round addition to the system in 1996. As well 70 permanent rooms for men and women at Strachan House (StreetCity II) have been added. Other possibilities are being explored (specifically a second shelter for native men and an Out of the Cold program which would be open every night during the winter).

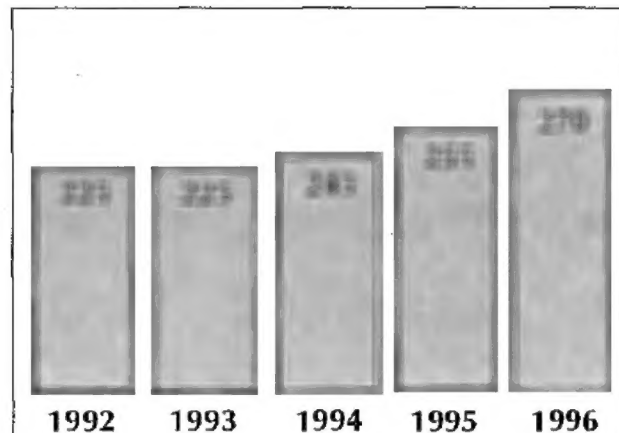


Figure 4. Average Occupancy - Women

Source: Metro Hostel Division "Status Report On Homeless Shelters" January 1996

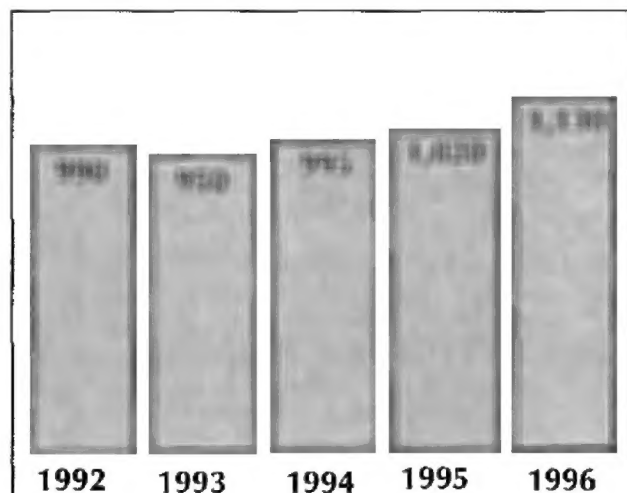


Figure 5. Average Occupancy - Men

Source: Metro Hostel Division "Status Report On Homeless Shelters" January 1996

Out of the Cold (single adults, winter only)

The Out of the Cold program expanded again in 1996 to 24 locations, increasing the average nightly capacity by 91 (140%) since 1994. Capacity for the winter of 1996/97 fluctuated from 100 to 240 spaces for men and women according to the number of locations open on a given night.

The Out of the Cold programs typically offer a hot meal in the evening. By supper time all sleeping mats have been assigned.

An improvement which has dramatically helped communications among the programs has been the addition of phones in most locations. Discussions are underway which could lead to improved coordination for this patch work of expertly managed volunteer programs.

Council Fire continues to provide over night drop-in services and hot meals to 100 - 150 people per night. It is open every night from 8pm to 8am during the winter. Guests come and go throughout the night and settle on blankets, mats and their own coats if they want to sleep. By some accounts this warm refuge, with its skilled and dedicated staff, is the place of last resort.



	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97
Out of the Cold (average nightly capacity)	65	90	156
Council Fire (average nightly use)	92	111	120

Table 3. Out of the Cold and Council Fire nightly averages

Source: Out of the Cold reported capacities and Council Fire Service Statistics

1.3 Decrease in General Welfare Assistance

In October 1995, the basic needs and shelter allowance portions of welfare cheques were reduced by 21.6%. The maximum shelter allowance for a single person was reduced from \$414 per month to \$325 per month; however, a room in a rooming house averages \$350 per month. A family of four (two adults and two children) which used to receive \$768 per month for shelter now gets \$602 per month; meanwhile, the average two-bedroom apartment in the City ranges from \$805 to \$939 per month and the average three bedroom \$957 per month.

Many people have moved from the appropriate accommodation they could previously afford to "double up" with others (increasing the physical, mental and emotional health risks of overcrowding) or have become homeless because they cannot afford their rent any more. Social service staff call this voluntary economic eviction. Housing Help workers report that in the most modest housing the "working poor" are replacing social assistance recipients who in turn are using the spaces in the emergency shelter system as permanent homes.

1.4 Cuts to Women's Services

Program cuts in women's services have been typically in the area of family violence. In Ontario many women's assault programs have been eliminated, including programs for correction officers to further their understanding of victims of spousal and sexual assault. Metro Toronto lost 25 programs for women in 1995/1996

and on a federal level, women's programs have been cut by 15%.

Cuts to Provincial Second Stage Housing Prevention and Education affect counselling and housing for women. For example, Nellie's, which provides housing and hostel services to women and children was forced to lay off a majority of housing staff, jeopardizing the operation of the Nellie's Housing Project. This will result in increased costs to individuals and the system as battered women and children are left with few choices to alleviate their situation.

1.5 Less funding for Drop-In Centres

Core Provincial funding from the Ministry of Community and Social Services Community Neighbourhood Support Service Program for drop-ins was entirely cut resulting in a reduction in services. Ministry of Health funding has also been reduced. These reductions are in addition to a series of cuts by all levels of government over the past three years.

Drop-ins generally have experienced a marked increase in the number of people using their facilities. For example, Central Neighbourhood House which operates a weekend and a weekday drop-in for homeless people saw an increase of 55% between August 1, 1995 and July 31, 1996. Many hostels are closed during the day and most public places have

restrictions on the amount of time anyone can "loiter".

Drop-ins are not only working with

increased numbers of homeless people but with people who are increasingly under stress. They report that some of the people requesting their services since the cuts are newly homeless and as such they have not yet acquired many of the coping skills that chronically homeless individuals develop

over time in order to survive life on the street. Central Neighbourhood House, in a recent survey, found that 33% of their users were new to the drop-in.

1.6

Cuts to Services for Homeless Youth

This sector has undergone several changes as agencies have struggled to adjust to Provincial funding cuts at a time when there are record numbers of homeless youth on the streets. Cutbacks to youth outreach services and shelters such as Street Outreach Services and Turning Point mean reduced services for many young people.

Last May a group of homeless youth moved into Nathan Phillips Square after being evicted from an abandoned building downtown ("squat"). This triggered a series of discussions about the housing and employment needs of homeless youth. These young people face high unemployment and major difficulties in obtaining and maintaining housing. Many landlords are reluctant to give youth an

opportunity especially when there are many adults with stable housing histories who also need housing.

In May 1996 a group of homeless youth moved in to Nathan Phillips Square after being evicted from an abandoned building downtown.

New eligibility criteria for General Welfare Assistance for people 16 to 18 years make it difficult for this age group to live on their own although some have been on the streets and in hostels for years. The criteria encourages youth to live with families; a problem for youth facing sexual and other forms of abuse in their family homes.

1.7

Future Financial Pressures

The province will disentangle financial responsibilities for education, social assistance, long term care and hard services costs (transportation, ambulance) and social housing. Social and health services comprise 78% of the programs to be downloaded from the Provincial to municipal tax base.

According to municipal estimates, this is not a revenue neutral proposal. The net download to municipalities across the Province is \$1.2 billion (estimate of August 6, 1997). If this legislation proceeds there will be significant financial pressure in order to maintain social services at their current level, perhaps necessitating property tax increases or service reductions.

Hostels, supportive and non-profit housing services will all be affected by downloading. Changes to the cost sharing arrangements for hostels result in additional costs to be borne by the Metro budget and there is concern about Metro's ability to absorb growing program costs. As well eligibility for Metro funded hostels may arise as an issue as Metro assumes a greater share of the operating costs.

The cost of social housing for Metro would be about \$369 million per year (including about \$167 million for projects in the City of Toronto). Key concerns are the current condition of this housing and the large number of people depending on subsidies. Adequate funding for capital improvements, especially for the aging Ontario Housing Corporation stock, is essential and there has been no guarantee that this will be provided. There are at least 85,000 people living in 40,000 social housing units in the City with 44,000 more waiting to be offered a unit in the Metro area. Downloading of this responsibility would affect thousands of individuals.

Pressure on the welfare budget may bring changes as well. It is anticipated that the definition of "disabled" and "employability" as it applies to Family Benefits will be changed in order to implement "workfare." The impact of these additional reductions and changes is not yet known.

Agencies that have received Federal funding in the past for their work with Native people are facing losses of funding as a result of a policy shift which will target

these funds for "on-reserve" programs.

The legislative changes and funding reductions make it challenging for the City and community agencies to respond effectively. The cuts that impact on the staffing and programming of shelters, drop-ins and transitional housing drastically limit the ability of the City and its partners to fulfil the community development objective of the "Off the Streets" policy. Operating only basic services is becoming more frequent among many of the agencies working with people to enhance their existing skills or develop new ones in an attempt to reduce homelessness and poverty. The work of supporting individuals to become positive and contributing participants in the larger community will be limited.



Section 2.

The Approaches Used by the City and its Community Partners to Respond to Homelessness

The people we work with are literally “on the streets” or are “precariously” housed with too few supports and services. Our definition of homelessness is consistent with that used by the United Nations and includes those who are homeless as well as people whose tenure in their housing is precarious.

We are committed to ensuring that:

- initiatives are linked through a community development process to ensure that homeless people can participate in the creation and management of their own permanent solutions;
- homeless people are safe, healthy and protected.

The City’s support therefore has been for projects and initiatives which are respectful of the rights and dignity of homeless people and which involve homeless people in a way which is meaningful to them. The people who are affected by our work live in “squats”, others under bridges and others live in shelters or rooming houses and some rent their own units.

The City of Toronto’s “Off the Streets” policy recognizes that homelessness is a multi-faceted problem that requires a variety of different problem-solving approaches depending on individual circumstances. Our approach is to maintain different kinds of partnerships with community agencies to achieve our policy objectives.

Policy objectives

There are three current components to the “Off the Streets” policy:

i) Prevention

This component of the policy is aimed at preventing loss of housing due to economic circumstances, difficulty budgeting limited resources, health problems, antisocial survival behaviours and other issues.

ii) Outreach and Support

There are people who are living “on the streets” and are not at the point where they are able to accept help or make changes in their lives. Support is provided to community agencies which maintain personal relationships with these people which, over the long term, can develop into the bond of trust necessary for someone to take the first step off the street.

iii) Support for Change

For people who have begun to identify their own issues and find solutions, agents of change can help in this process. A variety of strategies employed include access to more appropriate shelter and housing, health care, information and communications, community development and economic opportunities.

The City's Roles

The support the City gives has taken a variety of forms over the years. City Council established the Alternative Housing SubCommittee as a means of sustaining key initiatives and encouraging effective communications among City partners. This forum has been active since 1976. Services offered by the City have come from Housing, Public Health, Buildings and Inspections, Healthy City Office, Planning and Development and City Legal.

The following descriptions of City support focus on the role of Community Housing Initiatives within the Housing Division, Community Services. Current and ongoing roles for Community Housing Initiatives are:

Project Funding

- through Homeless Initiatives, which provides operating and capital funding for a wide variety of community-based projects, support for community economic development projects;

Project Development

- the creation of permanent housing through Cityhome, the Singles Housing Opportunities Program and Capital Leverage Fund with partners in various agencies and senior government;

Direct Services

- two Community Housing Workers in Housing and Community Health Officers in Public Health;
- intervention in "problem" rooming houses and support for the rooming house community through the Rooming House Working Group and the Rooming House Information Centre;

Partnerships

- support for temporary and transitional housing particularly at the 30 St. Lawrence St. Men's Shelter, Dixon Hall Long Term Housing, the "Schoolhouse" Men's Shelter, StreetCity and Strachan House;
- physical modification of boarding homes and provision of support services for psychiatric consumer survivors through the Contract Aftercare Program administered by Housing in partnership with Mental Health Program Services (Habitat Services) and Community Occupational Therapists and Associates (COTA);
- support for volunteer training, communications and coordination of services for Out of the Cold programs;

Research and Advocacy

- the facilitation and co-ordination of issues and activities particularly through the Alternative Housing Subcommittee;
- publication of reports on issues affecting rooming houses through the Rooming House Information Centre and Rupert Community Residential Services of Toronto Inc.;
- research to address the health risks of homeless people; training for staff on infection control; anger management sessions, improving access to health services.

2.1 Project Funding - The Homeless Initiatives Program

The Homeless Initiatives Program started in 1992, and has supported a wide variety of key initiatives which help community agencies provide outreach and support to vulnerable homeless people. The agencies have used the fund to start innovative programs, to reach new clients, to help people maintain their housing and develop employment skills as well as become active participants in solutions to their own problems.

Over the past three years the Homeless Initiatives Fund has supported three types of projects: innovative projects that are unable to get off the ground due to lack of "seed" or start-up funding; new projects that meet specific needs in the community but do not fit neatly into existing funding programs; existing projects that are underfunded or receive a "patchwork" of funding for their programs.

This is now a \$1 million fund and has been allocated as follows:

Emergency Street Projects (On-going)

In 1992 a Mayor's Committee was struck to look into ways that the City could provide better services to people living on the street. A committee of City and Metro staff and representatives from a variety of community groups identified a number of immediate needs that were not currently being met by existing services. Three of the principal needs outlined in the Mayor's report were:

- access to a warm, safe place during the cold weather months for those people living on the street especially those who are not using the hostel system;
- enhancement of the current street patrol system to add hours of service and improve the effectiveness of connections to the hostel system and other support services;
- an information system that provides "user friendly" information on the resources that are available to people on the streets and how they can best access those services.

In 1992-93 these projects were implemented by the following community agencies:

- Council Fire, an aboriginal Friendship Centre, expanded their day drop-in program to overnight in the winter season;
- Anishnawbe Health Toronto's Street Patrol added hours to their outreach service and connects with more people living on the streets of Toronto;
- Community Information Centre of Metropolitan Toronto trained and hired people who had experienced homelessness to be peer counselors on a "Street Hotline" telephone service.

These projects have proven to be invaluable services to people living on the streets and funding has continued since 1992.

Off the Streets Initiatives Survival Fund (2 years)

In response to provincial spending cuts and the ensuing hardships faced by low income and homeless people in the City, Council created a "Survival Fund" to deal with homelessness and other urgent needs. Council approved \$500,000 per year for 1996 and 1997. Seventeen projects were approved for funding and are now in operation.

One of the key priorities of the Survival Fund projects is to provide Housing Help to homeless and vulnerable people who have trouble both accessing and maintaining affordable accommodation. Eight agencies are funded to provide

Housing Help in 1997. They help the following client groups:

City Council approved \$500,000 per year for 1996 and 1997

- low income people through the provision of a housing registry, a mail and message service, and staff assistance in applying to public and private sector housing
- teenage women through supports to maintain housing, family reconciliation, peer networking and outreach to housing providers and support services
- homeless people by negotiating with landlords to provide housing, matching homeless people to appropriate landlords, and providing counseling and crisis intervention
- psychiatric survivors through the provision of conflict resolution and crisis intervention services
- drop-in users by helping them maintain their housing through crisis intervention, conflict resolution and financial management supports
- people who lack financial resources and social supports who are arriving at the Bay Street bus terminal
- low income women by providing direct services and crisis intervention, facilitating the development of community

skills, partnerships, and links to appropriate resources.

A resource group of the Housing Help workers meets on a regular basis to share information and housing strategies. Important issues identified by Housing Help agencies are the need to:

- prevent economic evictions;
- find and access appropriate housing including access to data banks or registries of available units;
- establish a "rent bank" to assist people with arrears;
- train housing workers, tenants and landlords in conflict resolution and crisis intervention;
- continue to advocate for funding for housing and support services.

Other programs funded under these grants are aimed at:

- helping street youth to find housing,
- preventing homelessness among teenage women,
- linking supports and referrals to homeless people seeking housing,
- intervening during crises to resolve conflicts for tenants in danger of losing

their housing,

- improving co-ordination of services run by churches in the "Out of the Cold" program,
- small capital grants for emergency equipment for agencies serving homeless people

Off the Street Initiatives (on-going)

This component of the Homeless Initiatives Fund was designed to provide support to innovative projects to develop long term solutions. It was developed jointly by Housing staff, representatives from other City Departments and a broad range of community groups after more than a year of consultations in 1991.

Some of the initiatives funded since the program was introduced include:



- a voice mail service for homeless people,
- a rooms registry for low income roomers and boarders,
- crisis support and housing assistance for refugees,
- peer mentoring and housing assistance for street youth,
- an outreach and linkage program for aboriginal women,
- a fundraising pilot project for an innovative women's street survivors project,
- community economic development ventures for homeless people,
- an educational theatre company which works with homeless people to write and perform plays about life on the streets.

City funds are used to provide "equity" leverage

provide additional capital funds to make projects viable.

In order to maximize the use of City funds, project funding is provided in the form of forgivable grants and long term, interest-free loans. The

combination of grant and loan is based upon the financial needs of the projects and the group's ability to repay. Loans

repaid can be used for future projects.

In late 1996, Council approved funding for the following projects:

- an emergency shelter and food program for 20 people, an emergency shelter for 18 women, and transitional housing for 11 people.
- an emergency shelter for 38 women.
- permanent housing for 40 people.
- renovation of an existing emergency shelter to increase capacity by 50%.
- temporary roof repairs to StreetCity.
- Fire and Building Code renovations to increase the capacity for a day-time and weekend drop-in for homeless people.

Capital Leverage Fund Survival Fund (2 years)

This new component of the program was developed to explore innovative ways to meet some of the housing, shelter and service needs of homeless people in the absence of funding from Federal or Provincial sources. Council approved \$1.4 million in capital funding to bring together the resources of community groups and those of the private and public sector. City funds are used to provide "equity" leverage to secure mortgages, support to lend credibility to fundraising campaigns and to

2.2 Project Development - Cityhome and SHOP

The Singles Housing Opportunity Program (SHOP) brings together the expertise of Cityhome (the municipal non-profit housing provider in the City of Toronto) and the experience of non-profit, support service agencies. It is an innovative housing program that has allowed singles to live independently in the community.

Through this program, the City has been able to assist a number of groups who had no previous housing management experience but knew their clients' needs well. One of the benefits of SHOP is that these groups are now developing expertise in housing management. This is a valuable service that Cityhome has provided to community groups in the City of Toronto.

The program consists of 23 different projects jointly managed by Cityhome and 11 different community agencies. Through SHOP 142 units of housing are available for a variety of single people including refugees, people with HIV/AIDS, socially isolated women, and youth at risk. 75 additional units for homeless people were being developed when the provincial government broke its agreements and cancelled the non-profit housing program in 1995.

**Through SHOP
142 units of
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2.3 Direct Services - City staff and Rooming House Information Centre

Rooming houses continue to play a critical role in the City's housing continuum. Given their relative affordability — the average room costs about \$350 per month — and factors such as de-institutionalization, economic

restructuring and gaps in the social safety net, they tend to house some of the more vulnerable members of society. There has, however, been a steady decline in licenced rooming house numbers over the past ten years from about 600 in 1986 to under 500 at present.

The Rooming House Information Centre, the information and referral service for rooming house related issues, and the Rooming House Working Group, a committee of City staff, community agencies, landlords and tenants, have been attempting to respond to some of the factors affecting the sector. These factors include the economic constraints faced by owners (relatively high mortgage rates, insurance premiums and other operational costs) and the support needs of both tenants and landlords. The Rooming House Information Centre (RHIC) surveys landlords to determine needs and landlord response to various issues.

Landlords report that they need assistance to maintain and upgrade the physical condition of their properties. Capital repair programs such as Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's Residential Rehabilitation and Assistance Program and the provincially funded Low Rise Rehabilitation Program have been, or will soon be, cancelled. The only program which can presently respond on a limited basis to the capital repair needs of boarding home owners is the City's Contract Aftercare Program.

There is clearly a need for support for both landlords (financial assistance, where to turn for help with tenants who experiencing difficulties, etc.) and tenants (life skills training, budgeting, trusteeships). The rooming house sector also needs support workers to monitor quality of life issues for tenants, aid in relocation, where necessary, and provide crisis intervention, community development and other supports. Housing Help workers funded through the Homeless Initiatives Fund are providing some of this support. RHIC staff and staff from Buildings and Inspections are currently working on a joint proposal to provide mediation in rooming houses with persistent building code violations.

2.4 Partnerships

30 St. Lawrence

Dixon Hall, an inner core community centre which works with homeless people, collaborated with the City to turn an old public works building into a shelter for 60 men in 1982. In the early 1990s, due to the deteriorating state of the building and the under-utilization of the site, redevelopment of the site was proposed.

City staff have been working with Dixon Hall on a new affordable housing project for the site. Through the City's Capital Leverage Fund, Dixon Neighbourhood Homes will receive \$400,000 to build 40 units of permanent housing for homeless men and women. The site will also be redeveloped into affordable live/work space for artists.

It is intended that the project will be a model for future collaborations between government, community groups, and the private sector in developing affordable housing for low income and homeless people.



Dixon Hall Long Term Housing

The City developed the Long Term Housing program with Dixon Hall in 1985. This program supports people who are moving from hostels into permanent housing.

Schoolhouse

The City has operated the Schoolhouse, a 70 bed facility for homeless men for several years. The residents pay \$6 per night for a bed in this dormitory style accommodation. Men choose this facility because they want to live with others who are working or trying to find work, they want some of the amenities of "home" and they want to pay their way. This is a unique form of shelter as it operates without Metro funding, collects rents and allows the men to set rules about limiting alcohol consumption (which is permitted). A housing worker from Dixon hall visits regularly and is available to work with residents as they require.

Homes First Society: StreetCity I

StreetCity has been internationally recognized as a leading edge project that recognizes the ability of homeless people to address their complex issues in a holistic way. Seventy formerly homeless man and women have lived in this renovated warehouse since 1988. It is a temporary solution to their homelessness as the interior "townhouses" were not built to last. The site was to be incorporated into a large scale housing development (called Ataritiri) which was cancelled.

City Housing staff continue to work with Homes First Society, the non-profit organization which manages StreetCity, on a relocation plan for the current residents. Homes First rents the building and the new owners of the site are unlikely to want to continue the current arrangements. Evictions notices may be served.

Homes First Society: Strachan House (StreetCity II):

In 1992 the City approved the lease of 53 Strachan Avenue to Homes First Society for a second StreetCity project. Annual rent was set at \$1. The City provided funding to employ homeless people to complete the first stages of renovating the old lumber warehouse. The Province provided capital funds in 1995 (\$4 million) for extensive renovations. The design is an urban village with single rooms in congregate houses under a single roof; future growth and management will be the tenants' responsibilities.

Integrated into this development is an innovative shelter project for chronically homeless women called "Savard's". This project is the first of its kind in Canada and perhaps North America. It is designed to shelter women who have been on the streets for long periods of time and cannot for one reason or another stabilize themselves within the existing women's hostel system. It provides shelter for 12 - 15 women as well as a variety of other services including food, laundry, showers, storage, camaraderie and/or privacy depending on the needs of the individual women. Women can come and go as they please and be assured of their bed being kept for them. Experienced staff are available to help the women on the women's own terms.

Eighty people moved to the main building before Christmas 1996 and several are making use of Savard's.

City staff co-chair and participate on the Strachan House (StreetCity II) Resource Group

Mental Health Program Services

Mental Health Program Services (Habitat Services) has been working with boarding home operators whose tenants are psychiatric survivors since 1986. Habitat Services monitors operators to ensure they continue to meet the terms of their contract which specifies program standards, complying with government legislation and that Community Occupational Therapists and Associates (COTA) provide social rehabilitation services to residents. This program provides a valuable model for cost effective housing provision for vulnerable people. An evaluation of this program is underway.

Out of the Cold Programs

There are about 40 faith groups involved in providing services in 27 locations across the City. They comprise a loose network of volunteer-based, winter relief programs which offer meals and overnight shelter in churches, synagogues and other locations. Two to four locations are open on any week night and about 200 people use the overnight shelter on any night. The City has provided crisis management and critical incident training for Out of the Cold volunteers. The schedule of nightly shelter space and meals has been designed, printed and distributed by City staff. Phones at most locations, paid for through City funding, have enabled better program co-ordination and referrals.

2.5

Research and Advocacy

Alternative Housing SubCommittee

This subcommittee of City Council's Neighbourhoods Committee has continued to meet every three weeks throughout the year. This is a continuation of work which began in 1976. The SubCommittee provides a forum for information exchange among housing and service providers for homeless people. Presentations are made about projects funded through the Homeless Initiatives Program, strategies are developed on government policy, funding programs and legislation affecting homeless and low income people. New ideas on solutions are shared and collaborative work is encouraged.



Projects which were ongoing throughout 1996 were the Refugee Housing Task Force and the Rooming House Working Group. A newly created Housing Strategy Group began work on options for housing, in an effort to develop new pilot projects.

Rupert Community Residential Services of Toronto Inc.

Rupert Inc. is the non-profit housing agency which grew out of the Rupert Pilot Project. This group oversaw renovation to over 500 units of private and non-profit rooming house stock and continues to do research and advocacy around issues affecting the rooming house sector. In 1996, Housing published two reports related to the work of this agency.

"Rooming Houses in the City of Toronto: Three Recent Studies" which includes perspectives on rooming houses in Toronto by Philippa Campsie, Harvey Stein, Charlotte Teeple and Kathleen Foley.

"Low Income Tenants and the Common Sense Revolution: The First Twelve Months", also by Philippa Campsie, serves as an update to "A Brief History of Rooming Houses in Toronto" and demonstrates the impact that cuts to General Welfare Assistance, the provincial non-profit housing program and other services have had on low income people.

Rupert Inc. is currently working on a manual for rooming house landlords and community agencies which will deal with crisis management, conflict resolution, housing, health and other issues.

Public Health

Housing and Public Health staff have collaborated on projects to improve access to identification for homeless people in order for them to obtain an Ontario Health Card and General Welfare Assistance.

The Tuberculosis in the Homeless/Underhoused Pilot Project addressed the health risks of homeless people and contributed to a better understanding of infection control issues. Manuals and training sessions on anger management and infection control developed by Public Health are now used by staff and volunteers in drop-ins and the Out of the Cold program.

Research and tracking of fatalities of homeless people began this year. Improved communication with Metro Police and the Ontario Coroner's Office has resulted.

Section 3. Recent Efforts to Respond to the Changes Affecting Homeless and Low Income People

3.1 Development of a Housing Strategy to Respond to the Particular Needs of Homeless People

Members of the Alternative Housing Subcommittee are discussing new and strategic initiatives for homeless people. They have identified various groups of homeless people, their present forms of shelter, gaps in programs and housing. The fundamental components of the strategy as discussed so far has four parts:

- community development aspects of housing;
- ensuring that people are maintained in whatever accommodation they presently choose;
- the myriad issues of access and barriers to housing faced by homeless people;
- better utilization of existing housing stock and development opportunities.

It is apparent that for too long the sector's concentration on affordable non-profit housing has resulted in a lack of alternative responses. It is obvious that homeless people need much more than a new supply of housing to lead safe and healthy lives. The particulars of the implementation strategy under discussion at the Alternative Housing Subcommittee will be forwarded to Council as they are developed.

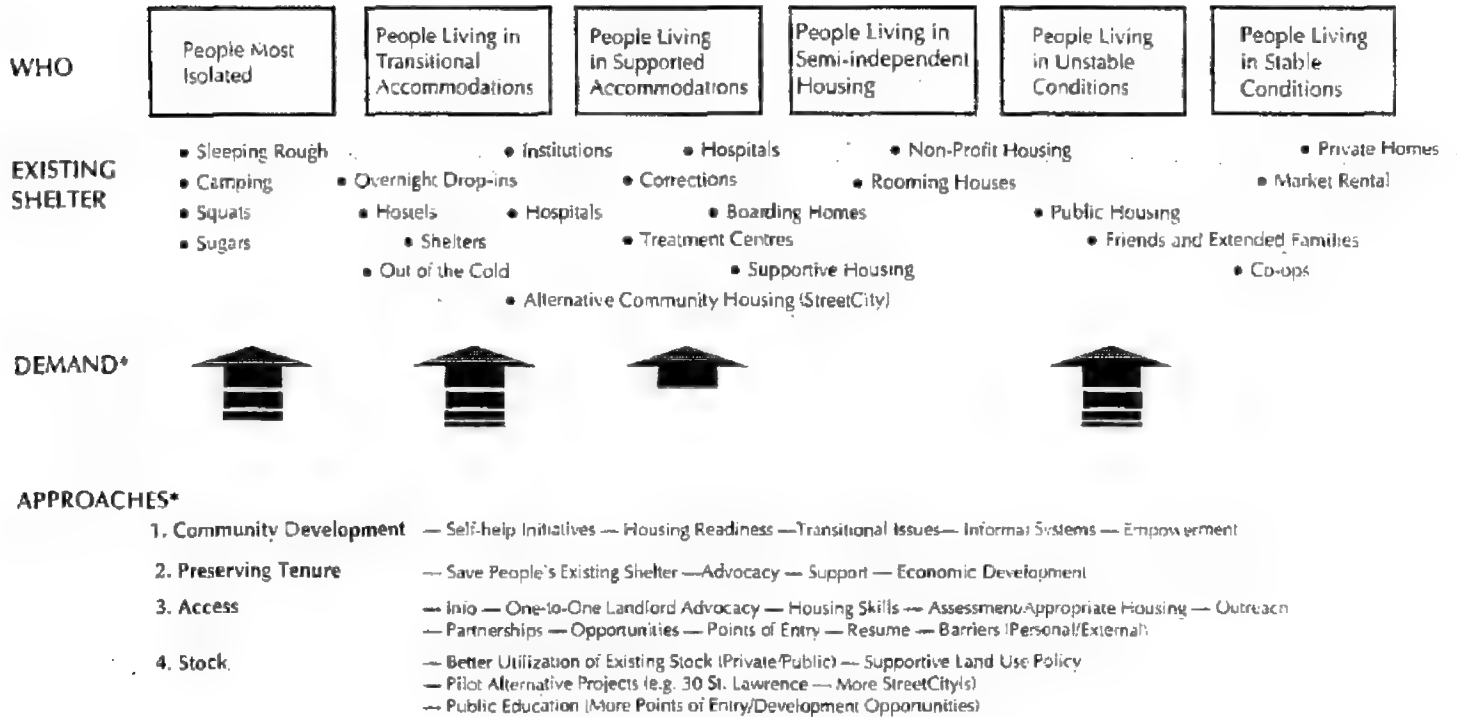
In a related exercise, Community Services staff are working on a broad housing strategy for the City which will be reported to Council in the near future. The strategy will identify City's role in providing new affordable housing stock. The topics to be researched for this strategy include:

- financing arrangements to make housing affordable;
- promoting a range of housing options;
- preserving and maintaining the existing housing supply;
- increasing the supply of rental and ownership housing;
- finding permanent solutions to homelessness and housing for people with special needs.

3.2 Making it Easier for People to Rent Private Sector Housing Through Pay Direct and Trusteeships

The cuts to General Welfare Assistance have necessitated new strategies for assisting people with limited resources to access and maintain housing. Many landlords have expressed a reluctance to house people on GWA. Two strategies being tested are pay direct and trusteeships.

Housing Strategy for Homeless Persons



Earlier this year, a joint proposal (Metro and the City) examined the pros and cons of a voluntary pay direct pilot project administered by one area welfare office and monitored over time.

Community agencies funded by the City were to provide support services (Housing Help) to people successfully housed. Unfortunately, this proposal was not implemented although pay direct continues in special cases. There continue to be inconsistencies at the various welfare offices in arranging pay direct for Housing Help clients.

There are many issues to be considered in advocating these approaches including the loss of autonomy by GWA clients and the possibility of abuse by clients and landlords. But as a means to keep rents affordable, these methods do provide worthwhile alternatives for some individuals who have difficulty finding housing.

Trusteeships provided by third party agencies overcome many of the obstacles inherent in the pay direct plan as agencies act as intermediaries. They receive the client's GWA cheque, pay the rent to a landlord and give the client the basic needs portion of their cheque. Agencies also serve a useful role, in some instances, in helping clients manage the limited resources left over for food and other needs.

Housing Help workers and Community Services staff have been working with a landlord with a large portfolio of self contained bachelor units who was willing to reduce rents from \$450 per month to \$325 per month, the maximum shelter

allowance provided to single GWA recipients, if he could be guaranteed direct payment of the rent from Social Services. Pay

direct for approximately two dozen individuals and trusteeships for approximately six others have been arranged.

The City established a system of calling upon extra resources during very cold weather.

3.3 Cold Weather Responses

The tragic freezing deaths of Eugene Upper, Irwin Anderson, and Mirsalah Aldin-Kompani last winter generated activity at many levels aimed at preventing similar deaths and improving quality of life conditions for homeless people in general.

Operation Cold Snap and Extreme Cold Weather Alerts

For fourteen days in February, 1996, the City provided a short term warming centre at the Moss Park Armoury. Triggered by the extreme and sustained cold which contributed to the three deaths, the City organized emergency overnight shelter for single men and women. This spontaneous initiative drew on the resources of the Department of National Defence, Housing and Public Health Departments, Red Cross, community agencies, private sector companies and volunteers.

Following "Operation Cold Snap", the City established a system of

calling upon extra resources during very cold weather. A task force, chaired by Councillor David Hutcheon, identified three levels of service (year round, winter and extreme cold weather) and proposed a system of enhancing existing service (i.e. shelter spaces, day and overnight drop-ins, street patrols, the street hotline and outreach efforts).

A range of interventions were planned for the winter of 1996/1997 including the amplification of existing services such as 24 hour telephone linkage using the Community Information Centre; enhancing the existing Street Patrol outreach service; the addition of approximately 100 beds in 9 shelters; extra Out of the Cold Program locations; increased resources (TTC transit tickets) for day time drop-ins; a pool of trained volunteers for specific responses; and the use of a City vehicle to transport people and supplies. The opening of Moss Park Armoury by the Department of National Defence was to be considered as a last resort.

The Medical Officer of Health, Dr. David McKeown, was appointed chair of a committee of advisors consisting of front line workers, municipal staff and volunteers. This group monitors the weather and the use of beds in the hostel system and on several occasions in winter of 1996/1997 has implemented extra services. At the time of writing the Moss Park Armoury has not been opened. A review of this work will be prepared in the spring and will include recommendations for future efforts.

3.4 Other Recent Efforts -The Toronto Coalition Against Homelessness and the Public Inquiry into Homelessness and Street Deaths in Toronto

The Toronto Coalition Against Homelessness (TCAH), a broad based coalition of homeless people and community agencies serving homeless people, was formed at the beginning of 1996. In May, the Coalition held a public inquiry into the homeless street deaths and issues surrounding homelessness. The resulting report, "One is Too Many", put forward 44 recommendations aimed at preventing further deaths and improving the quality of life of homeless people.

The Coalition successfully lobbied for an inquest and gained standing at the inquest into the homeless street deaths held this past summer. The Coalition continues to push for and monitor steps taken toward implementation of the inquest recommendations.

Coroner's Inquest into the deaths of Eugene Upper, Irwin Anderson and Mirsalah Aldin-Kompani

From June 26 to July 30, 1996, a Coroner's inquest was held into the deaths of Eugene Upper, Irwin Anderson and Mirsalah Aldin-Kompani. From the outset and despite strong protest from Metro, the City, Coalition members and others, the Coroner refused to allow evidence about how the lack of affordable housing, welfare cuts

and health issues aside from those pertaining to substance use might have contributed to the three freezing deaths. The inquest jury, however, stated that homelessness was a contributing factor in the deaths of all three men.

The inquest jury's twenty-three recommendations dealt primarily with improving, enhancing or restructuring existing services, making available necessary services and service coordination in areas including hostels and detox centres, health care, outreach services and housing. Many of the recommendations are directed at Metro which has taken significant steps in response to them. Those recommendations aimed at the provision of new hostels and affordable housing tie in with work underway at the City including creation of the Capital Leverage Fund and the development of a broad housing strategy. Discussions have also begun with respect to those recommendations that require coordination including a mobile health unit, a crisis line, street patrols and Street Hotline expansion.

Metro Advisory Committee on Homeless and Socially Isolated Persons

The Metro Advisory Committee on Homeless and Socially Isolated Persons, a committee of Metro Council co-chaired by Councillor Jack Layton and Ruth Mott of Central Neighbourhood House and made up of Metro staff, City staff, community agencies, homeless people and others was formed to examine issues related to homelessness and social isolation. These issues include drop-in and emergency services, preventative measures and long-term solutions to homelessness and isolation.

Following the inquest, the Metro Advisory Committee struck a subcommittee called the Inquest Response Team (IRT). The IRT is chaired by Professor David Hulchanski (University of Toronto, Social Work) and made up of Metro staff, City staff and Coalition members. The objective is to prioritize the recommendations and propose an action plan for implementation. This plan was presented to the Committee in February 1997.

Conclusion

The number of people touched by homelessness is growing. People are losing their stable housing and there are more people who are isolated from almost all social supports. There are new complexities of issues as people who have never been homeless before mingle with those on the street for longer periods. Community services are stretched and solutions are difficult to implement.

To be homeless is to be in crisis. Experience indicates that the longer people remain homeless the more complex and diverse the issues become. Now more than ever the City needs to remain committed to its original principles and to support a range of homeless initiatives that provide homeless people with opportunities to improve their lives.

Systemic Causes of Homelessness

The systemic causes of homelessness are complex, interrelated conditions, some of which are better understood than others. The following includes a synopsis of the most well documented and obvious factors contributing to homelessness.

Many of the issues described below can be characterised as collective policy failures. Society is unable to come to terms with the complexity of the causes and thus struggles to provide the services needed for the people who are currently homeless and to stem the tide of the newly homeless.

Lack of Stable Employment:

- structural changes in the economy have had a pronounced impact on jobs in the Metropolitan Toronto area. Approximately 87,000 jobs were lost in the City of Toronto between 1990 and 1995. Many people who once had jobs in the manufacturing sector are now unemployed.
- without stable employment people are often poor. Once someone is in the cycle of homelessness and marginal housing, stable employment is even more difficult to find.
- unemployment can result in a myriad emotional problems for the individuals and families. This in turn affects the ability to obtain and maintain housing while struggling to obtain employment.

Long Term Poverty:

- Poverty is both the obvious and the documented primary factor in homelessness. A homeless person once said: "Housing is a very crucial part of poverty, but it is not all of it. It's impossible to deal with one aspect of poverty." The other faces of poverty - unemployment, underemployment, malnutrition, inadequate incomes, an increased gap between rich and poor, and insufficient access to health and child care, education and training - are part of the cause of homelessness and part of the effect of homelessness on the individual.
- The current systems of income maintenance - welfare, disability pensions, unemployment insurance, Workers' Compensation were inadequate before the recent cuts.

Housing Supply Issues:

Lack of safe, affordable housing is a major problem in Metropolitan Toronto as in many other urban centres.

- gentrification of the inner city means the loss of affordable neighbourhoods with informal supports and communities.
- governments have not been building affordable housing at rates to meet the demands and have not provided incentives for the private sector. New

communities often need resources to help set up formal and informal supports as well as innovative forms of housing.

- community opposition, "Not In My BackYard" has been heard over and over as new housing projects are attempted across Metro.
- rising costs of land in the urban areas can be attributed to speculation and gentrification. Both have made the replacement of stock difficult financially.
- housing programs and private landlords have a tendency to view the traditional nuclear family as the only legitimate form of family. This leaves single adults or youth, single parent families, extended families and other combinations of people living together struggling to find appropriate housing.
- due to the high cost of living in Toronto an individual must have a good salary or access to subsidized housing for survival. Shelter allowances provided through social assistance are generally not adequate to cover the costs of safe, affordable housing on the open market.

Supports to Maintain Housing:

- Metropolitan Toronto has a wide range of services but they are not comprehensive nor are they integrated. Too many people still fall between the gaps in services.
- Abuse (sexual, physical, emotional and verbal) is a cause of homelessness because of the complex after-

math for the victim:

- the victim must flee existing housing to find safety,
 - the recovery period can last a life time,
 - the trauma can result in severe behavioural problems which interfere with social interactions including maintaining housing.
- People with multiple, complex problems have inadequate supports to help them stay in housing. People with substance abuse problems in combination with other problems have the least supports and are at the greatest risk to become and continue to be homeless. As more and more programs are cut back there are fewer supports available.
 - Chronic institutionalization (e.g. jails, hospitals) leave individuals without skills necessary for employment and housing.

Policy changes which affect housing in the City of Toronto include:

- Federal reductions in support programs to other parts of the country. For example, reductions in regional aid to the Atlantic provinces results in increased use of Toronto shelters as people migrate

here in search of work and cannot find any. Similarly cutbacks to Native communities can be related to increased numbers of Native Peoples on the streets. An increasing national debt has meant regular cutbacks to all social spending.

- Migration towards large urban centres occurs when people move looking for employment, support services, cultural and sports opportunities especially when other regions experience economic decline.
- Provincial cutbacks are rapidly reducing the social welfare safety net including:
 - General Welfare Assistance, supports for battered women, day shelters for homeless people, etc.
 - Metro continues to face unprecedented cuts in all areas which affect homeless people: hostels, public transit, a range of supports, subsidized child care, etc.

Rigid enforcement of municipal and Provincial legislation:

The Fire Code and Building Code are open to interpretation and thus are dependent upon individual inspectors being sensitive to the spirit of the overall goal. Innovative new housing programs which do not fit into existing categories can be jeopardized by narrow interpretations and the loss of the original spirit of regulations.

De-institutionalization of people who are mentally ill, developmentally delayed or have been similarly institutionalized has

been chaotic because the necessary community supports are not in place. These policies have also resulted in groups of people who have never received any supports although a few decades ago they would have been institutionalized under different policies.

Health Issues:

- Severe/chronic illness often results in unemployment and poverty even when the person receives government assistance. Both are major barriers to safe affordable housing. People with AIDS can also face illegal discrimination and thus are refused housing.
- Frail elderly people often lack income at a time when they have decreased capacity to maintain the family home. Often this results in the need for smaller more affordable housing with supports. Many do not require nursing homes but are at a serious disadvantage within rooming houses.
- Many people with mental health problems (including psychiatric disorders, head injuries, addictions, etc.) are able to work and find and maintain housing. Others however are seriously disadvantaged because of their illness and are very likely to become homeless.
- There is a major difference between the person who is temporarily without housing but

has the resources to find and maintain housing and those who lack the bonds of family and community necessary to remain in housing.

- Homelessness can also be caused by inadequate supports for the person disabled by mental illness. Disorganized thinking and actions, poor problem-solving skills, problems mobilizing oneself, lack of ability to take care of basic personal needs and poor social skills which affect one's ability to interact with others can all negatively impact on obtaining and maintaining housing.
- The problems associated with addictions range from non-payment of rent to violence. Because many addiction related activities are illegal, incarceration in jail is frequent and often results in homelessness on release.

Visible minorities:

- Discrimination although illegal still exists and results in limited access to safe, affordable housing. This is an important problem when combined with other factors in this section.

New Immigrants/Refugees:

- When people first arrive and are unaccustomed to Canadian customs and laws, they are frequently discriminated against, exploited and denied housing

Non-traditional forms of families:

- Single parents with children are generally women who have become poor because of a change in marital status. The combination of poverty, time and energy needed for child rearing on their own and lack of job skills results in limited employment opportunities. In addition many landlords do not want children in their buildings and will take steps, however illegal, to maintain adult only buildings.
- Many landlords prefer singles with money or traditional nuclear families.

People who are disadvantaged in more than one of the above:

- The more challenges that the person or family faces, the more difficult it is to obtain and maintain employment and housing and thus the more likely they are to face chronic homelessness.

The Effects of Homelessness

Here are some of the effects that homelessness can have upon individuals and families. Although the effects have been identified separately for clarity, it is important to remember that most effects of homelessness happen simultaneously because they are so interconnected. Unfortunately many of the issues described here apply to men, women, youth and children from all backgrounds. Many of the problems can be alleviated, if not actually solved, by permanent housing especially if supports are available.

Employers are reluctant to hire a homeless person:

- It is difficult to work during the day while sleeping in a hostel or under a bridge. It is almost impossible to hold a night job while on the streets. Where do you sleep during the day?
- Homelessness brings with it - lack of credibility, status and acceptability - all of which affect obtaining and maintaining employment.
- It is difficult to maintain good job skills e.g. getting to work on time when living in a hostel where you have no control over your environment.

Increased difficulty obtaining and maintaining housing:

- Many people living in shelters occasionally live in marginal housing until eviction forces them back onto the streets. This cycle facilitates the loss of skills necessary to obtain and maintain housing. The survival skills nec-

essary on the streets can contribute to homelessness as described below.

Increased poverty:

- Most surveys of homeless people find that homeless individuals identify lack of available cash as a major problem. This lack of money to live on results in poor nutrition, inadequate clothing, problems with personal hygiene, etc.

Theft:

- Anyone on the streets who is seen as vulnerable is in danger of having their money/valuables stolen or coerced from them.

Lack of access to benefits for working poor people:

- Individuals who have a sub-standard income from their jobs and who are not receiving GWA or FBA have serious difficulty paying for dentists, prescriptions and other items which may be covered by benefits of the income maintenance programs.

Increased problems for aging and ill people:

- All of the problems associated with growing older and/or poor health are accentuated by being homeless. It is harder for the elderly to walk the streets and using public

transit can be difficult (if they have the fare). As the person's hearing and vision become impaired they are at greater risk of theft. People who were proud of their street fighting skills may not acknowledge their lessening strength and still may try to fight stronger people.

- Many street people avoid the health care system as much as possible but as their bodies need more assistance, this becomes a major difficulty.
- Because of intravenous drug use and lack of access to condoms, homeless individuals join the general population at risk for AIDS.

Increased health problems generally:

- Inadequate diet and rest, exposure to the elements, etc. do not promote good health.

Lack of nutritious food:

- Although tied in closely to other problems, this is among the most frequently reported problem by homeless individuals. Nutritional deficits result from limited access to an adequate diet. Homeless people are unable to prepare their own food in hostels and if they miss meal times at soup kitchens fast junk foods are the only option if the person can pay.
- Meeting special dietary needs such as a diabetic diet or one low in sodium, fat or cholesterol becomes almost impossible.

Special issues for women:

- As in the general population more women than men are sexually assaulted and/or abused.
- There are many misconceptions about homeless women which affect their housing. For example, people have unfortunately assumed that "street woman" means "street walker." All homeless women are not prostitutes, yet landlords often put restrictions on male guests. Myths are also rampant about battered women. "She deserved/provoked it." "A man is king in his own castle." Because of these beliefs, it has only been in the past ten or twenty years that shelters have been developed for battered women. Many women are one punch away from homelessness.
- The increases in stresses related to unemployment, cuts in benefits, homelessness can result in increased family violence.

Special issues for children:

- Moving from school to school is extremely difficult for young people in many ways and interferes with their personal growth and development, their physical and mental health, and their education.

- Some are concerned that children in hostels may be at especially high risk for substance abuse because they are under extreme stress and have access to alcohol, drugs and cigarettes.

Special issues for youth:

- Youth are at particular risk for problems associated with experimentation of different substances and sexual activities because of the developmental stage of this age group.
- Youth face additional challenges now around accessing General Welfare Assistance especially those who are 16 and 17 years old.
- Many landlords do not want to rent to any youth but especially homeless youth because of concerns re: regular rent payment, damage to property etc.
- Obtaining and keeping proper identification especially health cards are problems for this population.

Increased frustration/anger:

- Life on the streets is an ongoing source of frustration for the individual. One is constantly waiting in line for food, shelter and health care; often outdoors in foul weather. There are also the endless bureaucracies which must be negotiated. All of these frustrations must be seen in the context of no place to feel safe and secure; no home to escape to.

Substance use:

- The incredible stresses connected to street living have a strong tie with the use of alcohol and drugs. It is easy to

understand the lure of intoxication to dull the harsh reality of the streets. Note that housed people also have similar issues (e.g. stress) but they are not as visible when it happens in a person's home. Problems related to substance use and abuse can lead to a downward spiral as the person is unable to maintain housing.

Increased vulnerability to violence/crime:

- Life on the streets is dangerous - prostitution, theft and violence are all experienced on the streets and in the shelters. Someone who is considered frail (gender, age, disability etc) is at risk of becoming a victim of a crime perpetrated by anyone - another street person or by other members of society.

Loss of papers used for identification:

- A frequent problem for street people is theft and loss of papers which are traditionally used to identify oneself e.g. birth certificate, Social Insurance Number, health card number.

Increased susceptibility to depression and other mental health problems:

- Living in shelters or in marginal housing can lead to depression, a normal reaction to an abnormal environment. Si-

tuational crises do not necessarily mean that a person is mentally ill but do mean that help is needed.

Increased symptoms of mental illnesses:

- The stresses of street living can result in an intensification of an existing problem. For example, a paranoid person can be understandably frustrated with the illness. This is then compounded by the frustrations of homelessness as previously described. These multiple frustrations make it very difficult for the individual to trust anyone including service providers.
- Symptoms like psychosis (or other strange behaviours) can be defence mechanisms in threatening situations, e.g. acting very "crazy" will often encourage others including bullies to leave you alone. This is an important strategy because crime is a pervasive aspect of shelter life.

Meeting one's needs becomes a full time occupation:

- Finding food, shelter, money and the other necessities of life takes large proportion of the day and requires ingenuity. This takes away from the person's ability to effectively search for employment and/or housing and affects one's ability to parent.

Survival skills on the streets are not appropriate everywhere:

- Strategies to deter crime can include very bizarre behaviour such as loud talking to oneself and avoiding trouble by averting eye contact, ignoring crime as it happens. Distrust of

co-residents, hoarding of scraps of food and not bathing in order to avoid theft of belongings can be survival skills in hostels. The latter can be grounds for eviction from housing or being barred from drop-ins, yet these can be important ways of surviving in a shelter or drop-in.

- Often the best solution for problems in shelters or on the streets is for the person to walk away from the situation or change locations. This strategy can be a problem in shared housing with an emphasis on working issues through.

Impact of CHRONIC homelessness:

- Characteristics of chronic homelessness can include decreased interpersonal interactions, neglected personal hygiene, increased passivity and increased dependence on others. Because the negative aspects of chronic homelessness are so similar to characteristics of chronic mental illness, it can be difficult to distinguish between these two situations. There are differences - not everyone who is homeless is mentally ill. When homelessness is combined with mental illness, the individual has serious problems reintegrating into mainstream society again.

- The process of adapting to street life impacts on individuals and families when the learned survival skills become the core of their lifestyle.
- It is now possible for children and youth to have spent years in hostels and be chronically homeless.

Chronology of City of Toronto Homeless Policies and Examples of Projects

1982

Dixon Hall designed their housing program for homeless men. This included small group preparation for housing, continuity of support as well as the identification of barriers to obtaining and maintaining housing.

The Supportive Housing Coalition was established to promote the development of housing geared toward people with mental health problems/illnesses.

1983

The City of Toronto Housing Registry was approved by Council and started service to advertise vacant rooms for free.

Metro Toronto Task Force on Housing for Low Income Single People resulted in:

- CMHC including singles as eligible for rental subsidies and allocating funds for the rehabilitation of existing rooming houses in Metro.
- Metro Council setting up the Metro for Singles Corporation now known as Metro Toronto Housing Development Corporation.

1984

Mayor's Action Task Force on Discharged Psychiatric Patients resulted in recommendations for:

- the development of the Contract After-Care Project. As a further result, Mental Health Program Services (Habitat Services) was established and the role of support services in

boarding homes was legitimized.

- the establishment of the Gerstein Crisis Centre.

Homes First Society opened 90 Shuter Street, a housing project for the homeless.

1985

Off The Streets presented by the Alternative Housing Subcommittee/Dixon Hall was approved by City Council as the official city policy statement supporting long term housing and support for the homeless. This also supported the work initiated by Dixon Hall.

Metro Committee on Emergency and Short Term Accommodation resulted in the increase of the number of shelter and hostel beds as well as an increase in the range of services offered.

1986

Cityhome and Metro Toronto Housing Authority began accepting applications from single people for housing.

Metro Toronto Housing Authority began defining psychiatric disabilities as an eligible disability.

1987

Habitat Services began funding boarding home operators based on the level of services provided.

Fred Victor Mission and All Saints Church began the process which

replaced their hostel beds with permanent housing.

1988

Case management services established for homeless mentally ill men and women.

The Graham Report, Building Community Support for People: A Plan for Mental Health in Ontario (The Provincial Community Mental Health Committee) set out a blueprint for a community mental health system in Ontario.

1989

Singles Housing Opportunity Program started.

Rupert Hotel fire.

1990

Homeless people moved into StreetCity; housing built by and for homeless people, 70 units.

Gerstein Centre fully operational with mobile crisis intervention services and 10 short-term crisis beds.

Homeless Persons Outreach Project completes the report Homeless, Not Helpless

Rupert Pilot Project, an initiative to improve the housing conditions of tenants in some of the City's worst rooming houses, began.

1991

Council approves the creation of the Homeless Initiatives Fund to support a range of community based projects which serve homeless and underhoused people.

The Big City Mayor's Caucus of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities

prepared a national action plan on housing and homelessness.

1992

Homeless Initiatives program started by the City.

The City of Toronto Rooming House Review to examine the recommendations of the jury at the inquest into the 1989 Rupert Hotel fire which killed 10 people and other recommendations presented at the inquest by the Rupert Hotel Coalition was completed.

1993

The Housing Department's Rooming House Information Centre, an information and referral service for rooming house tenants, landlords and service providers started operation.

The Rooming House Working Group, a subgroup of the Alternative Housing Subcommittee started to examine rooming house issues in the City.

1995

Provincial cutbacks to social services, housing etc.

Council approves the Survival and Capital Leverage Funds

1996

"Operation Cold Snap" which opened the doors of Moss Park Armoury to homeless people and the Homeless Emergency Action Task Force and its Extreme Cold Weather Strategy planned for the winter of 1996-1997.

Metro Committee Advisory Committee on Homeless and Socially Isolated Person established.

The establishment of the Toronto Coalition Against Homelessness (TCAH). TCAH's Public Inquiry into Homelessness and Street Deaths.

The Provincial Coroner's Inquest into the Deaths of Eugene Upper et al.

The Inquest Response Team began to prioritize inquest recommendations and propose a plan of action for implementation.

The completion of 53 Strachan (Streetcity II), an innovative housing project for street people.

List of Projects Supported by the Homeless Initiatives Program - 1996

Housing Help Centres

- *Connect Information Post* is assisting low income people to find and maintain affordable housing through the provision of a housing registry, a mail and message service, and staff assistance in applying to public and private sector housing.
- *Jessie's Centre for Teenagers* is working to prevent homelessness among teenage women through supports to maintain housing, family reconciliation and support, peer networking and outreach to housing providers and support services.
- *Mental Health Program Services* is assisting low income people to secure appropriate accommodation by providing necessary supports, linking and referring homeless people to landlords that provide affordable accommodation, and educating and supporting landlords in the preservation of low income housing stock.
- *Toronto Christian Resource Centre* is identifying homeless people who need housing or are at risk of losing housing, negotiating with landlords to provide housing, matching homeless people to appropriate landlords, and providing linkages, counselling and crisis intervention, as necessary.
- *Parkdale Activity and Recreation Centre (PARC)* is helping psychiatric survivors and other people at risk of becoming homeless maintain their housing through the provision of conflict resolution and crisis intervention services and to connect high needs people to the ongoing programs at PARC.
- *St. Stephen's Community Centre* is providing housing support to drop-in users by helping them maintain their housing through crisis intervention, conflict resolution and financial management supports.
- *YMCA First Stop* is providing crisis intervention and housing access supports to "at risk" people who lack financial resources and social supports who are arriving at the Bay Street bus terminal.
- *Dixon Hall and the Women's Services Network* is preventing low income women from becoming homeless by providing direct services and crisis intervention, working with women to develop mutual self-help and support, and facilitating the development of community skills, partnerships, and linkages to appropriate resources.
- *St. Paul's Anglican Church - City funds* are being used to assist the "Out of the Cold" program provide better co-ordination of services run by churches involved in their program, provide educational workshops for volunteers, and

to improve communications between the churches and community services.

- *Street Health Community Nursing Foundation* - is helping homeless people pay the costs of the identification they need to access community services.
- *Regent Park Community Health Centre* - is hiring and training homeless and underhoused women who use drop-ins to provide information, referral, support and community education services to peers.
- *Hispanic Development Council* - is working to prevent homelessness among Hispanic youth by providing outreach, crisis intervention and family counselling, assistance in maintaining housing, and linkages to appropriate community services.
- *Street Outreach Services* - is helping homeless and low income special needs youth access or maintain housing through working in collaboration with housing and support staff in the community.
- *Dixon Hall* - A mini grant helped Dixon Hall purchase woodworking tools and equipment for a woodworking project for homeless men.
- *Eastminster United Church* - A mini grant enabled Eastminster United Church to rehabilitate a shower room used in the church's Out-of-the-Cold program.
- *Good Shepherd Refuge* - A mini grant enabled the Good Shepherd Refuge to purchase additional bunk

beds and increase the capacity of their men's shelter.

- *Street Haven at the Crossroads* - A mini grant enabled Street Haven to complete much needed plumbing work to improve the water pressure and purchase washers and dryers at their women's shelter.

Innovations and longer term initiatives:

- *Open Door Centre and Rooms Registry* - operates a Rooms Registry which assists low income and homeless people in finding clean, affordable housing.
- *Sistering* - City funding allows Sistering to provide outreach, linkage and referrals with low income and homeless aboriginal women, and offsets the program costs of their Sunday Drop-in program.
- *St. Christopher House* - operates a community economic development project with the homeless and low income members of The Meeting Place drop-in.
- *Mixed Company* - works with Cobblestone Theatre to produce educational theatrical productions about life on the streets and the search for housing. Projects include current and former homeless people in the cast and crew of the

production.

- *Pape Adolescent Resource Centre* - operates the "One Stop Housing" project which provides peer mentoring to street youths, assists them in finding housing, educates them on the rights and responsibilities of tenants, and provides housing information workshops.
- *"Inspirations"* - provides staff support to work with low income and homeless women in developing small businesses and community business projects.
- *"416" Drop-in Centre* - provides a residence clean up service for socially isolated people who are having problems maintaining their rooms/apartments and are in danger of losing their housing.
- *Central Neighbourhood House* - operates a voice-mail service for homeless people to facilitate their search for employment and contact with social service agencies.
- *WoodGreen Community Centre* - has hired and trained "homeless matchmakers" to facilitate the transition of chronically homeless people from shelters and hostels to non-profit supportive housing.
- *Neighbourhood Information Post* - works on an ongoing basis with women and children who are at high risk of becoming homeless by facilitating the formation of a women's support group or "buddy system" to provide support during times of crisis.
- *Sojourn House* - assists refugees and refugee claimants who are living in the shelter system or who are homeless access affordable housing. They provide crisis support, help refugees access public and private sector housing, and provide information on housing legislation and the rights and responsibilities of tenants.